

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF NON-CONFORMIST ART SHOW

REF: MOSCOW 2281

1. NON-CONFORMIST ARTISTS GROUP IS PLEASED WITH RESULTS OF EXHIBIT AT MOSCOW'S EXHIBITION OF NATIONAL ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS (VDNKH), WHICH ENDED FEBRUARY 26, BUT HAS HAD NO WORD FROM MINISTRY OF CULTURE ON REQUEST TO HOLD EXPANDED EXHIBIT THIS MONTH (REFTEL). LAST WORD FROM MINISTRY OFFICIALS WAS THAT MATTER WAS STILL "BEING STUDIED."

2. ACCORDING TO LEADING UNOFFICIAL ARTIST, OSCAR RABIN, CROWDS AT VDNKH BEEKEEPING PAVILION GREW IN SIZE EVERY DAY DURING WEEK OF FEBRUARY 19-26, BUT ARTISTS HAVE NO WAY OF ESTIMATING TOTAL ATTENDANCE. "TENS OF THOUSANDS" CAME TO EXHIBIT SITE, BUT MAY LEFT WITHOUT ENTERING, APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF LONG WAIT INVOLVED, SOMETIMES UP TO FOUR OR FIVE HOURS. LINES WERE ESPECIALLY LONG OVER FEBRUARY 22 WEEKEND, WITH EMBOFFS PRESENT ESTIMATING TWO OR THREE THOUSAND WAITING AT VARIOUS TIMES OF DAY. NO MAJOR INCIDENTS WERE SEEN OR REPORTED, AND ORDER, ENHANCED BY PRESENCE OF CROWD-CONTROL DEVICES OF MILITIA PREVAILED. ATTITUDE OF MILITIA WAS GENERALLY COURTEOUS. MOOD OF CROWD INSIDE EXHIBIT SEEMED TO BE ONE OF INTEREST AND CURIORSITY

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TOWARD UNUSUAL NON-SOCIALIST-REALIST PAINTINGS. FOR

MOST PART, SPECTATORS HAD HEARD OF ART SHOW VIA FOREIGN RADIO AND WORD-OF-MOUTH, AND SOME HAD COME FROM FAR REACHES OF MOSCOW AND EVEN OTHER PARTS OF USSR TO VIEW EXHIBIT. NO LOCAL ADVERTISING OR MENTION IN SOVIET MEDIA OCCURED, TO EMBASSY'S KNOWLEDGE.

3. COMMENT: FROM ARTISTS' STANDPOINT, EXHIBIT WAS MAJOR SUCCESS, ALTHOUGH SOME NON-CONFORMISTS WHO DID NOT EXHIBIT HAVE CRITICIZED LIMITED NATURE OF SHOW, SEEING IT AS PLAYING INTO HANDS OF AUTHORITIES HUNGRY FOR CONTROL OF UNOFFICIAL ART MOVEMENT. SOME SPLITS IN MOVEMENT MAY BE PATCHED UP IF NEXT SHOW IS ALLOWED TO TAKE PLACE, FOR IT WOULD ALLOW MUCH WIDER REPRESENTATION. IN CULTURAL AUTHORITIES' EYES, MAIN PROBLEM WITH REQUEST FOR LARGER SHOW MAY BE THAT IT WOULD TAKE PLACE TOO SOON AFTER VDNKH EXHIBIT, WHICH WAS A CONCESSION TO UNOFFICIAL ARTISTS, AND WOULD THEREFORE INDICATE LACK OF CONTROL ON THEIR PART. WE WOULD GUESS THAT THEY WILL TRY TO DELAY NEXT SHOW FOR SOME TIME, IF IN FACT THEY ARE DISPOSED TO AUTHORIZE IT AT ALL.
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